

Peak Creek Ruritan Club

Laurel Springs, NC

June 2, 2008



Dear Sen. Goss and Rep. Tarleton:

The members of the Peak Creek Ruritan Club, representing Ashe and Alleghany Counties, are opposed to a recent recommendation that the Upper Mountain Research Station (UMRS) be closed. This was one of several recommendations made by the North Carolina General Assembly's Program Evaluation Division's Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee. We are surprised and concerned that such a recommendation has been made.

Persons unfamiliar with the diversity of climate and growing seasons for the various plants in this unique mountainous region of the state may wonder why this station is so vital to our area. Four of our thirty club members have conducted research projects on most of the Research Stations throughout the State and are familiar with the System and its needs. While the climate along North Carolina's southern coast is similar to that of northern Florida, the northwest corner of the state where the UMRS is located, has native plants and a growing season similar to those in southern Canada. Therefore, there is a vital need for such a facility in this area where the climate and growing season are unlike that of any other regions of the state.

For example, researchers at the UMRS are presently developing a system for the commercial production of strawberries that would provide fresh strawberries five months of the year. Another strawberry project at the station, which has become a local commercial enterprise, is that of transplanting young strawberry plants for a few weeks in this region's cool soils. This system allows the plants to produce fruit the first year instead of having to wait until the second year. Last year one local grower transplanted 8 million strawberry plants. These plants were later dug and sold to producers in Florida for retransplant and fruit production. Strawberry research at UMRS includes 2 major areas and 8 sub areas. Research at the station has also led to the release last year of a new variety of red raspberry named "Nantahala" which is adapted to this area. In recent research projects, considerable attention is placed on studying and evaluating factors unique to the growing season in the northwest corner of North Carolina.

Fraser Fir, the predominant National Christmas tree and number one agricultural crop in North Carolina, is native to the higher elevations of northwestern North Carolina. The UMRS is the only research station at a high enough elevation to conduct the best research on this economically important tree. Harvest of Fraser Fir

is not until seven or more years after transplanting into the field, therefore any research projects on this tree must bridge several years. Currently, there are 9 major areas of research with 14 individual studies ongoing on Fraser Fir Christmas Trees at UMRS.

Other ongoing research projects at the UMRS include animals and other crops. Animal projects include goats with 5 sub areas and beef cattle. Additional crop research not mentioned above include burley tobacco with 7 aspects of research, oil seed crops, corn, wheat, barley, and oats as well as 9 areas of research in blackberries, mushrooms, blueberries, raspberries and grapes. Current research also includes organic crop production, ornamental plants, and deer depredation studies. (See enclosed *Ashe Mountain Times* article and the Overview of UMRS Projects for 2007 for more details.)

Given today's problems of climate change and exorbitant energy costs, the station has stepped forward with a study of wind in the area to see if wind energy farms would be practical. Solar energy research in this climate and altitude could also be done here.

Both state and federal agencies and conservation groups are encouraging consumers to shop locally for food. Many opportunities exist for local farmers to market a variety of adapted varieties of produce in the communities of Northwestern North Carolina. Ashe County now has three Farmer's Markets. Surrounding counties also have farmer's markets. The Upper Mountain Research Station is developing varieties and production practices necessary for locally grown produce. The unique climate in this part of the state cannot be simulated at any other station.

The Upper Mountain Research Station is not only a vital center for research in a unique climate for North Carolina but it is also a community center. Tours are provided to school groups, local garden clubs, local Christmas associations, cattlemen's associations, goat producers, organic farmers, vegetable growers, and small fruit growers. The agricultural sustainability projects are popular. A biannual Christmas Tree Equipment Show and Demonstration is held at the facility.

Dr. Johnny Wynne, Dean, College of Agriculture and Life Science at NCSU, stated in a letter dated May 2, 2008, that NCSU, "...has not advocated for the closure of any agricultural research stations." Other groups and/or agencies that we know of who oppose the closing of the UMRS are the Ashe County Board of County Commissioners, the NC Christmas Tree Association, the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation.

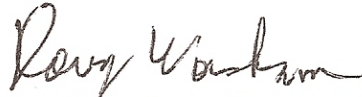
The Peak Creek Ruritan Club commends the difficult and conscientious work the PED Oversight Committee did in carrying out its charge of recommending changes to improve efficiency in the State Research Station System. However, we believe that the Upper Mountain Research Station should remain in place as an active, efficient, integral and important part of the Agricultural Research System in the State of North Carolina.

We thank you both for all that you do for the people in the northwestern part of the state and thank you for your careful consideration and whatever actions you can take in helping fulfill our request. Rep. Tarleton, we appreciate your sponsoring the recent bill to protect the Upper Mountain Research Station.

Sincerely,



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Enc.

cc. Sen. Marc Basnight, President Pro Tempore
Rep. Joe Hackney, Speaker
Mr. John Turcotte, Director PED
Dr. Johnny Wynne, Dean, CALS, NCSU
Hon. Steve Troxler, Commissioner, NCDA&CS

OVERVIEW OF UPPER MOUNTAIN RESEARCH STATION PROJECTS FOR 2007

CHRISTMAS TREES, FRASER FIR

- Nutritional needs evaluation
 - 1) Evaluating optimum fertilization for Christmas Tree production on 2nd rotation (Eric Hinesley) LS10
 - 2) Incorporation of animal waste (compost) for treatments. (Greg Hoyt) HOYTCT01
 - 3) Deep level phosphorus incorporation (Greg Hoyt) HOYTCT2UM
 - 4) Determine optimum rate of fertilizer for deep placement. (Greg Hoyt) HOYTCT05UM
- Insect pest management
 - 1) Establishment of ground cover habitat for predatory insects to control spruce spider mite (Fred Hain) FPH9
- Cultural management/Shearing practices
 - 1) Development of optimum production practices (Eric Hinesley) LS15
 - 2) Reduce inputs while maintaining quality of 8-10 foot market tree (Eric Hinesley) LS14
- Evaluation of other tree/ fir species – Hemlocks
 - 1) Production of nontraditional conifer species (Fred Hain, Bill Dvorak) FPH8
 - 2) Possible replacement for Fraser Fir.
- Genetic clone bank
 - 1) Production of genetic clone bank seeds on Fraser Firs (John Frampton) Clone Bank
- Grafting study
 - 1) Evaluating grafting mortality on Fraser Fir (John Frampton) GSM Grafts
 - 2) Evaluate grafts of Fraser Firs on rootstock of other Abies species (Hinesley, Frampton) LS12
- Evaluate for growth and physiology in relation to weather measurements (Eric Hinesley) LS5
- Cold frame
 - 1) Utilizing cold frame for container grown nursery stock evaluating Balsam Woolly Adelgid population (BWA) (Fred Hain) FPH-7
- Insect resistant varieties
 - 1) Evaluate Fraser Fir that are resistant to BWA (Fred Hain) FPH-10

BURLEY TOBACCO

- Weed management
 - 1) Herbicide tolerance selection (Robbie Parker) 07BHSLS
- Sucker control
 - 1) Regional sucker control (David Smith) 07BRSCLS
- Variety evaluation and breeding. Official Variety Test (David Smith) 07BOVTLS and
- Regional Quality Test (David Smith) 07RQTLS
 - 1) Evaluation of new genetic material to enhance production and reduce inputs (Jennifer Nicholson) LS07 Yield
 - 2) Resistance to blue mold, and other disease pressures as well as insect resistance LS07 Yield
- High nitrogen fertilization vs. blue mold incidence. (Greg Hoyt, Kelly Ivors) HOYT 07-7
- Planting date study (Loren Fisher) 07PDHDL
- Fertilization rate study (Robbie Parker) 07BFERTLS